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The Nation's Sorrow and Consolation:

A Sermon preached in St. James' Church, New York, on the Sunday after the death of President Garfield.

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BY THE

REV. CORNELIUS B. SMITH,

Rector of the Parish.

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The Nation's Sorrow and Consolation:

A Sermon preached in St. James' Church, New York, on the Sunday after the death of President Garfield.

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REV. CORNELIUS B. SMITH,

Rector of the Parish.

Prayer and Science.
The Revelation of Humanity.
The Power of the Christ Spirit.
The Duties of the Hour.

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON & CO.

1881.

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New York, September 30, 1881.

Dear Mr. Smith:

The undersigned members of St. James' Church respectfully request that you will oblige them with the manuscript of your most admirable sermon, "The Nation's Sorrow and Consolation," delivered on Sunday morning, together with a copy of your Monday address on President Garfield, with a view to their publication and preservation.

We are, dear Mr. Smith,

Very faithfully yours,

Jas. Grant Wilson, Thomas Rutter,
Edward Livingston, Walter Shriver,
Fred. S. Salisbury, Lyman Tiffany,
William H. Duff, David Dows,
Everett P. Wheeler.

New York, October 28, 1881.

My Dear Friends:

As the national sorrows through which we all have been passing involve many permanent lessons relative to the sphere of prayer, and the teachings of God, I thank you for your kindness, and cheerfully place these thoughts at your disposal.

Very sincerely yours,

Cornelius B. Smith.

Gen. Jas. Grant Wilson, Thomas Rutter, Esq., Edward Livingston, Esq., Walter Shriver, Esq., and others.

SERMON.

"For behold, the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah, the mighty man, the man of war, the prudent, the honorable man, the counsellor, and the eloquent orator."—*Isaiah, III.—1, 2, 3.*

On the last Sunday morning in June, St. James' Church at Long Branch was filled, as usual, with worshippers. Among them there came very quietly and unobtrusively a gentleman and his daughter. Some children, in an adjoining pew, might have had their attention somewhat distracted had they conjectured that the President of the United States was so near them. However, they simply noticed that he was a person of imposing presence, and in splendid health, a kingly-looking man, evidently forgetful of himself and absorbed in the services. After the worship was concluded, the greetings of a few of his acquaintances disclosed his office to those who were standing near him. Every one was attracted by his bearing. He seemed to be neighbor to all mankind. Inquiries were made and answered as to the health of the invalid wife at Elberon. His daughter, evidently full of joy and honest pride, waited for others to speak with him, then took his arm and left the church with him: seeming to say in her heart—"He is your President! He is *my* Father!"

Behind all this happiness a fiend was lurking—that more cruel thing than savage brute—a man going through the earth, and leaving behind him the slimy track of a bad name; reputed to be one who would take food and shelter without thanks or payment; if insane, a man whose weakness was so thoroughly saturated with selfishness as to silence the excuses of charity; a cruel man with conceit beyond the height of Appenine; his whole life revolving around the selfish worship of himself, and willing, for the furtherance of his own opinions, to crush the whole world, if need be, like a worm; a shadow dogging the footsteps of the good, the great, the happy; a craven coward as to his own life, a prodigal of others'; a creature well content that brave and pure hearts that had never injured him, should, for weeks, be walking on a mine which he was digging beneath their feet; a disappointed office-seeker murdering at last the true man who had told him "Nay!" and glorying in the sensation of a horror-stricken world as though he were the central actor in some pretty piece of melodrama.

It is hard to resist the rising of the question—Why did God suffer this?

The best answer is doubtless the long one, to be revealed in years to come. But the shortest explanation gives much light. Such possibilities as this crime are necessarily hidden in the blessed gift of man's free will. Except for this free will, humanity would be undone—Government, Art, Science, Religion itself would be wrecked. But the penalty must be paid for every gift, so long as this earth abides: for some men will abuse it. And among the costs of free will, the world has, now and then, a Guiteau, and even a Judas Iscariot.

It is better to have them than to lose Free Will: for it builds faster than they can destroy.

Moreover, such crimes are a part of the education of the race. It is no longer hard to believe in the history of the human fall through Adam. Such terrific crimes as that of the 2d of July, suggest the enormous and far-spread possibilities of evil, latent, even now, in a moment's sin of one bad man. The Lord may shield this nation from the perils to which the madness of assassins opens the way. But in the terrible suggestion of what one pistol shot may do toward changing the course of history, we learn the vanity of human boastings, and the need of all men seeking shelter, reverently, under the arms of God. Imagine Martin Luther, or Elizabeth, or Washington, removed by private violence before they had set their mark upon their time, and consider what enormous changes in human progress would have been involved. So, too, the black deed of that wretch at Washington might have done incalculable evil. Wise men will look through the veil of false security pierced by the fatal bullet, and see the incompleteness of our best civilization. Now, as ever, the world is saved from ruin chiefly by the loving patience of the Infinite Father. He is always delivering us from ourselves, and saying "My children, how long!"

None of us can ever forget that momentous Saturday:—the stunned nation!—and the startled world! all thinking of one heart-broken household: all following with prayers and fears one flying railway-train bearing the Wife whom her husband's peril had made strong again.

How wonderfully do the blackest things of earth bring out God's brightest lights: like the electric fires across

the thunder cloud. It is the Almighty's witness that virtue shall never go down under the darkness. All that long day was brightened by the loving sympathy of innumerable homes:—by the prayers of thousands, like arrows entering the skies: by the never hypocritical grief of little children:—by the deep emotion of men unused to weeping:—and in the midst of all by the perfect Christian self-command of "one little woman:"—and the quietness of the chief sufferer—the strong man subjected to life's most crucial test: standing at morning on the very summit of human prosperity, at noon lying prostrate on the invalid's couch, in the audience room of death. But his manly words went around the world before night-fall: "I know how to die! I am not afraid!"

Still there was "one chance," so the physicians said, that he might recover. The sufferer said, "I will take it!" Medical science said, "I will take it!" The praying Christian world said, "I will take it!" However the "one chance" failed us all. Really it was *not* a chance, as the autopsy has proven. Death lay in the nature of the wound; but so long as the physical facts of the case were concealed, there seemed to be a "chance," that is to say, one of the turning points between loss and gain, where God puts the lever into the hands of science and prayer, and man's fellowship with the Almighty enables him to join with Him in turning the courses of history.

But, as it was finally proven, science had been looking in the wrong direction for the wound, and prayer had been asking what God was not to give, for miracle would have been necessary, and in this age God manifests his will that miracle should not be expected, and

prayer should seek relief only through the divinely-guided use of ordinary law.

Who thinks of forsaking Science because our President has died? But it were an equal absurdity to renounce, for the same cause, our faith in the power of Prayer. It is but the simple truth to say that both Science and Prayer were vindicated by many results of that unusual sickness. It was marvelously prolonged by both, and in such a way as to bless mankind as never did any sickness before since the world was made. Could either Science or Prayer reasonably ask more than the God of Wisdom and of Faith has given? We asked for our way, and He gave us what was even better.

It seems to me that our recent experience might well go down into history as *The Wonderful Eighty Days*. For the first time all the earth, during such a period, was kept watching beside one sick man. Such an opportunity could not have come by accident. It was evidently the result of divine combination, prepared by Him who keeps the Clock of Ages, and brings the pointers to the year and month and day and hour and minute He has chosen. Never before had opportunities for world-wide and instantaneous communication coincided for so many weeks with the universal longing to receive details from one anxious household. That longing was itself created by the bringing together of many causes. There was no such commanding greatness in our President as to account for it. Able and gifted as he was, he had not stood as a giant above his countrymen before his office and its sorrows brought him before the world's eye. Those who do not see this truth miss the very moral of the hour. When God wishes to show all men each other's hearts, He does not choose for

the central figure a person who represents supremacy, but rather one who represents brotherhood. It would be hard to have found another who could so well as our President, have fulfilled this office for the whole family of man. To many thoughtful minds, Sir William Gladstone would have seemed better entitled to such a position than any other living man. But he could not have commanded a similar judgment from the multitudes of human kind. The circumstances surrounding President Garfield gave him a peculiar command over the whole world's affections.

In the first place he stood as the representative of the most popular movement of the age. All human society is gradually tending toward the establishment of republican government; and it is perhaps difficult for Americans to realize the peculiar enthusiasm with which foreign mechanics and laborers look upon the man whom fifty millions of freemen choose from their own number, and voluntarily put at their head. This feeling is immensely increased, when, as in this case, such an one is known to have risen from poverty and obscurity, and to have fought his way up to the first gift of the nation. Every toiler in the world feels himself ennobled by thinking of him. Suppose now, in addition, such an one, by that adaptability, which is peculiarly American and democratic, successively and successfully fills those differing positions which establish sympathies with very varied constituencies. Imagine him to be a college man, thoroughly educated, retaining no trace of his early obscurity:—fond of literature, of philosophy and of poetry: a reader of books, with rare powers for quoting the noblest passages of the language—a charming companion for a day, full of digested and of original thought. More-

over let him be a man who, at the call of his country, in a moment of peril, leaves civic life, enters the military service, bears himself bravely as a soldier and becomes a General; yet after the war resumes his profession, followed by the love of his comrades in arms. Then let him be surprised by a summons of his State, sending him to Congress. There let him so distinguish himself by a manly and effective oratory as to become the leader of his party; taking high ground in matters of Civil Service Reform, and uttering speeches which henceforth become part of the literature of this subject. At *length* let him be elected to the first gift of the nation. As soon as he reaches this position, and before his administration has been tested, let it be seen that he is physically a man of robust health, mentally a man of broad views, morally a man of temperance and honesty, socially a man of deep family love, and religiously an earnest Christian. And what have you, at last, as the result of these combinations, altogether unusual, but a man who though not gigantic, is marvellously comprehensive, and capable of touching the sympathies of the round world on every point of its sphere.

For some purpose God prepares such a man, and then sets him on a pinnacle.

Then a blow, sudden as a bolt from a thunder-cloud strikes that man, as if to destroy the whole result of the preparation God has made, and before sunset, there is one throb of sympathy throughout civilized humanity. It is the new age of the Electric Telegraph which supplies the key of the whole movement; making possible, at last, the things which could never have been done before.

Actual history, forthwith assumes for eighty days all the attractiveness, both of the drama and of the serial story. *A drama*, because the central figure is every inch a hero, and the wife who watches at his side, wholly a heroine ;—and both of them appear under the tests of the sharpest contrast between high Prosperity and the sudden entrance of Death, ushered in at the call of a fiend. *A serial story*, because for eleven weeks and more, the whole earth from King and scholar down to the *day laborer* asks—" How fares the President to-day ?" nor only asks but also gets a daily answer. Precisely as in a romance many characters are grouped around the central one. Each of the physicians, the nurses, the daughter, the special friends become household names in the homes of millions of people. As in a novel, they are discussed, their characteristics are well known, they become the friends of all the reading public, and when the last number of the story is issued, there is a lonely feeling as the group dissolves from view, and ceases to belong to every one. We have all heard the legend of the wandering house of Loretto ; said to have been borne in the air finding its welcome, now here, now there. The parable has had a broader interpretation this Summer, in one household, which has found its home everywhere.

Meanwhile, mankind has recollected that, in the nature of the case, the passing history is not complete in itself, but only a sequel ; and thus multitudes, who, if the President had not been wounded, would never have known how this thoroughly representative American's life had been developed, have traced him back to the fire which cost his father's life, and out of which the boy came, in his infancy, almost like a *brand* from the burning.

Such was the singular combination of circumstances, clearly nothing less than Divine, under which our President was enabled by God, to gather to himself, on his sick bed, an amount of world-wide affection, such as never centred, at the same moment, on any human being before him. He was wise enough not to be elated by it. He knew that, through him, it came from humanity to humanity. It was the tribute to fortitude, to patience, to heroism. There was not a single utterance of impatience, of dismay, of distrust. The physicians had never seen such a patient. Common men can have self-command in days of strength. He was king of himself, in his weakness :—ready for everything :—daunted by nothing. All this was from God. The perfect royalty with which he lay waiting for the divine will, cheerful and care free, illustrated to all mankind how completely a Christian can take Dean Alford's view of this passing life ; which the traveler recollects as cut upon his monumental stone at Canterbury—

"Deversorium viatoris Hierosolymam profiscentis."
The wayside inn of a traveler on the road to Jerusalem.

Surely if anything could ever touch the world's emotions as they had never been touched before, it was just such a tragedy as that at Washington and Elberon. The more one studies the multiform combinations which were necessary to make that appeal to humanity just what it was, the clearer it is seen that this affliction, like the rod of Moses, was *designed in Heaven* to smite the so-called "stony rock" of the great human heart, and to make its waters come forth.

And they have indeed "gushed forth like the rivers." Such a blessed refutation of the common slander against our race—that it cannot feel—was never before given. The whole world is disclosed to itself as all nations meet

together around the new-made grave at Cleveland. Our President's death has created a new era—"Henceforth we are brethren!" Nothing could have been better worth dying for than to create the first occasion for mankind to know the generous depths of its own sympathies. England and America are made known to each other, beside one dear pale face, as a century of common living would have failed to reveal them. We are *humbled* to see so much more of universal human love than any of us believed in. It is a revelation from God.

We were, indeed, prepared for much foreign sympathy. We had read those messages from the Queen in which the woman spoke; and the replies from Washington, in which another woman responded simply and bravely, like a very Queen of sorrow. And we knew full well that the words from the English throne simply uttered the feelings of the British nation. Still we were blind to much that we now see. The care, the grief, the suspense seemed mostly our own, as it grew from week to week, until finally the nation took tenderly into its arms its dying chief and bore him to the sea, as softly as on *eagle's wings;* while all along the way the crowds stood mute and prayerful. It was fully revealed on that wonderful journey that corporations do have souls. Railroad embankments had grown in a night; nothing had been wanting that could be done by money, work or forethought. At Elberon, on the evening before the invalid's journey, the proprietor of a summer residence had represented the feeling of every American householder, when, in reply to the surveyor who said, "The track must run through your flower bed," he answered, "Let it go through my cottage

if it will be of any service to the President." The little boy who begged the privilege of helping to drive one spike represented every American child. And the engineer of the train that rolled over the lawns to the shore represented every American mechanic, when personifying the engine that had drawn such precious freight, he said—"She was as quiet as a lamb, she did not spring as usual, jarring the passengers; and when she increased her speed to fifty miles an hour, she fairly held her breath."

And when thus our hopes were raised, and the fresh, salt air which fanned our President's cheek seemed to cool us all, we began to count him secure of recovery. But the sad change came suddenly, and he quietly passed away one night, near the roar of those never-tired waves.

We were at first so overwhelmed with our personal sorrow that we did not realize how many brothers, all over this no longer divided world, were sharing it. The earliest disclosure of the universal depth of kindred emotion was the astounding discovery that our so-called "dangerous" classes seemed to grieve the most. They bought the portraits of the President; they paid him actual reverence, they kissed his features, they shed tears, exclaiming—"Ah! you were once poor like us; you knew how we felt." Our streets have been suddenly turned into vast aisles of mourning; so that we can appreciate the question of the little child when led by her mother along the sidewalk. Seeing the black on every building, she turned and said, "Mamma! is everybody dead?"

After this manifestation at our doors we are ready for anything that may appear as the testimony of all the world's sympathy. For well we know that seas do

not separate hearts, and what the great humanity is here it must be elsewhere; and forthwith, under three thousand miles of tossing waves, the throbbing cables pass on to us the thrill of our brothers' hands on the other side. And so we know that the great bell of St. Paul's is booming over Ludgate Hill. The shops all over England are half closed. The very drivers of the wagons in the streets of London are wearing badges of mourning as they jostle along the Strand and Cheapside and across the Thames. These tokens of the feeling of the common people are very significant and very precious; but it is no less true that the aristocracies and the capitalists of the first countries of the earth join deeply and most humanly in the general burst of grief. The Courts of different nations go into mourning; and the Queen, true to her noble womanhood from first to last, sends her wreath to be laid upon the bier of one who, not many years ago, was a poor log-cabin boy.

Brethren the world moves! I know not how much this astounding revelation of human love may mean to skeptics. But its significance, for Christians, goes far beyond the feelings of the present hour, which, from their nature, must be transient. I cannot see in it anything less than a great rift in the clouds, showing us, by one of those sudden visions which can never be forgotten, the depths behind. It seems to me that no one has ever before seen what world-wide sympathy really is; but now, our President, by dying, has became God's strange instrument, for first revealing the loving world to itself as one household, smitten with a common sorrow. *For such a result, I believe he would have been glad to die.* This world can surely never be to me what it was before. It is a nobler, better, grander

world than any of us had thought it to be. Man has been revealed to man as more than ever a brother, by this very issue of the eighty days, against which we prayed. God has heard our prayer by a larger, and deeper, though more tearful answer than we dreamed of. Let me not be misunderstood when I even say that a fresh light is thrown upon that saying of our Master: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Far from my lips be the impiety of comparing our President with the Christ. I am speaking especially of his sickness. It was given to him as a sufferer, to be brave as a lion, yet gentle as a woman, free from all vengeance, and sunny as the morning, making every effort to live, yet indifferent to death; and, imperfect man as he was, herein to manifest distinctly the *Christ Spirit*. Not one word of bitterness for the murderer went forth from that sick room. Under the awful provocation, this silence was sublime, and the whole earth was moved by it. For the Christ Spirit, by whomsoever shown, is this world's conqueror, but especially when represented by any one who, like our Lord, has won his way from poverty to honor; and then has been struck down, by the wicked, in the day of his power.

Such is the real meaning of this great emotion which just now is sweeping around the globe like a tidal wave. It does not belong to our President as an individual, attractive, gifted, and good as he was, but rather *in* him, to that nobler ideal of perfect manhood, which, in the course of Providence, he was called upon to represent. Magnificent patience under trial, magnificent calmness before death, magnificent readiness to exchange the best of earth for a Christian's heaven. Thank God, it is now proven that this great world, so often called sordid,

cruel, selfish, is still ready to bow down, spontaneously, and without command, before any vivid manifestation of the Christ Spirit. Here is the great power, after all, with which to conquer this earth. Not prisons, and not cannon balls, but heroic fortitude under provocations; the imitation of the Lord under trial, brings the world to its knees, and makes it weep and pray. It will not be strange if skeptics wholly miss the real significance of these days. But it is no mere surface meaning that we are to read in the unwonted spectacle of the vast crowds massed at intervals, all along the line between Washington and Pittsburg, solemnly standing in the long, dark night; until, if the telegram reports correctly, as the funeral train passes by, hundreds of strong men sink reverently to their knees. We Christians ought to understand that this profound emotion, though expended upon one of the best of our human brothers, really belongs not to him: it is too deep—too holy—to be appropriated by or for any mere man. It really certifies to the power of the Christ Spirit over humanity, not yet defined to itself, and only grasped indirectly through some frail man's partial interpretation of it. It is a prophecy of that glorious morning when all selfishness and all worldliness shall break down before goodness, and the sacrifices of Christians shall so lift our Saviour to His throne in human hearts, that he shall reign supreme from sea to sea. So this world of ours, shall be at last redeemed by His Spirit, from greed, and cruelty, and every form of selfishness. "Give me the place to rest my lever," said Archimedes, "and I will move the world." The human heart, so often despaired of, is proven to be that place. Only not Archimedes, but Christ, as represented by a Church far more pure and self-denying than

we are, shall finally become the master of that position.

This, brethren, is the real meaning of our President's funeral. It uncovers and reveals the great power of world-wide sympathy, as never did any like sorrow disclose it before. Here, in our parish, we stand, a group of mourners about a grave. Outside of us, our city makes a larger circle. Outside of the city the States of our Union are grouped like sisters. Outside of our country, other nations are observing the solemnities, in courts, in cottages, in streets, in churches. Mighty congregations gather at London, in St. Paul's Cathedral, and St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, and while the hymns of faith are sung, our brothers and our sisters stand sobbing there. Thank God for those dear tears. Thank God for that statement in the *Spectator*, that of the ninety millions of the English-speaking race there have probably not been fifty persons, during the past few weeks, who would not have gone out of their way to do a kindness to the American President. And so the outer circles of this grandest funeral that the earth ever knew, cut through Australia and the islands of the sea, and become the zones of the world itself.

Such honor, I say again, belongs not to any man as an individual. It may be paid as such a tribute, but its origin lies deeper. It is the homage of humanity to the power of Christ-like fortitude, under Christ-like conditions of sharp contrasts in origin, in progress, and in catastrophe. For when any vivid imitation of our Lord is lifted up, it draws all men unto Him.

The lesson of the hour therefore, combines prophecy with admonition. To us, Americans, the admonition should first address itself. Reform the Civil Service! Uproot the giant evil of the spoils system! but for which our President would have been alive on earth,

to-day. Let that majestic shaft which shall overlook Lake Erie, be a perpetual monument to one in whose death his foes died also, and craft and greed were exchanged for a new rule. Offices free from corruption; and given for merit only.

But there is a lesson larger yet. It touches not merely one evil, but all wrongs. Here as we stand, with the whole world, around one grave, let us clasp our brothers' hands, and solemnly kneel together. It is the place and it is the hour for devoting ourselves to a higher life, to a larger sympathy, to a stricter honesty, to a more generous sacrifice: our Lord from Nazareth, King of Righteousness is the only King of men. He is the founder of a new race of rulers; sons of Adam who are at last made rulers of themselves. Let us consecrate our strength by helping human society to put itself under His laws. Here, in the Elder Brother, is our only brotherhood. Here in the imitation of His sacrifice, His holiness, and His friendliness, is earth's only liberty. There are no freemen except those whom Christ and His truth make free.

But with Him, creation moves! hearts melt! immoralities perish! The new day dawns!

"Thou framer of the light and dark,
Steer through the tempest Thine own ark:
Amid the howling wintry sea
We are in port, if we have Thee."

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